

VELADOR

Science-Based Sea Turtle Conservation Since 1959

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Does the Cayman Turtle Farm Have a Future?

In October, Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) added its voice to those calling on the Cayman Turtle Farm (CTF) to cease producing sea turtles for human consumption and convert to an educational and conservation facility benefiting green turtles in the Caribbean. Although our founder, Dr. Archie Carr, originally supported CTF in the

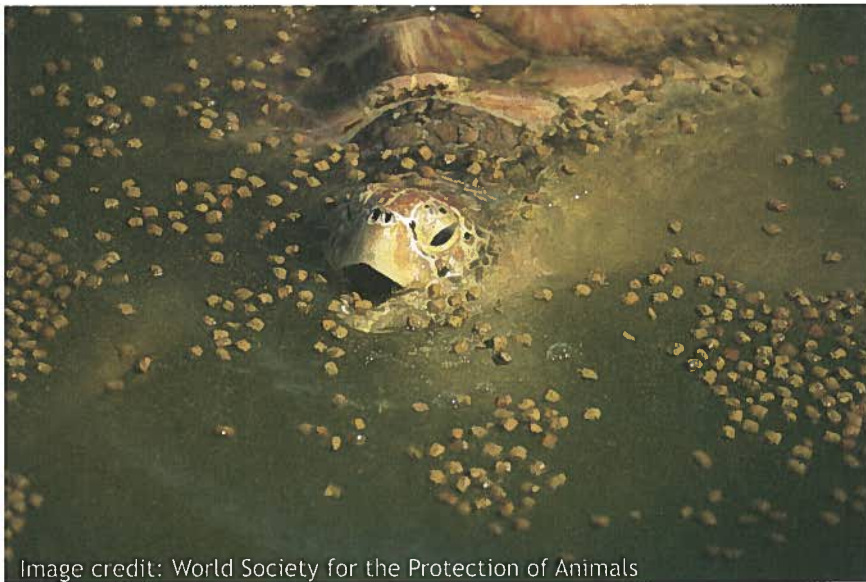


Image credit: World Society for the Protection of Animals

1960s to reduce pressure on wild turtles, he eventually became an ardent opponent, recognizing that to save sea turtles they needed to be taken off the menu. In recent decades, STC has criticized the CTF for failing to meet appropriate humane, conservation and scientific standards, and we have worked with other organizations to keep CTF products (primarily meat) out of international markets. Because the Farm is one of the most successful tourist attractions in the Cayman Islands, however, the local government has resisted all calls to shut it down, choosing instead to subsidize the operation.

The latest campaign to end turtle farming at CTF is being spearheaded by the World Society for the Protection of Animals. STC became a vocal backer of the campaign after 300 turtles perished this summer because they were left in a tank with no water. In fact, STC members who have visited the Farm regularly contact us to express concern about the poor appearance of turtles crowded into tanks filled with dirty water. British authorities, who have jurisdiction over the Cayman Islands, have agreed to undertake an in-depth review of CTF operations. This situation has generated a lot of press in the Cayman Islands and abroad, including comments from Sir Paul McCartney about the need to stop sea turtle farming at CTF. As a result of media coverage, conditions at CTF are improving, but resolution of STC's scientific and conservation concerns will be more complicated. In all situations involving the release of captive animals to the wild, the potential for spreading diseases to wild

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Inside: New Tracking Technique May Aid Efforts to Save Loggerheads

2013 Sea Turtle Scenes



Holiday Gift Guide: Sneak peek at STC's new sea turtle gear for the holidays

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populations is a serious concern. The stress of captivity is conducive to disease under the best of circumstances, and poor sanitation has been an ongoing issue at CTF. The Farm claims that its strict release protocols ensure the health of wild populations, but evidence does not support this claim.



Image credit: WSPA

A significant scientific issue is the effect of CTF turtle releases on the Caribbean green turtle gene pool because the Farm releases turtles of mixed genetic stock. At the time that these releases began, sea turtle scientists did not know that sea turtles from different nesting areas have distinct DNA that allow us to identify their nesting beaches of origin. Turtles hatched at CTF are of mixed lineage because the breeding stock of the Farm originated from six distinct areas in the Western Atlantic, specifically Suriname, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guyana, Ascension Island, and Mexico. Once genetics were understood, many in

the sea turtle conservation community appealed to CTF to stop releasing turtles. Turtle releases are popular with tourists, and CTF continues this practice.

In December, an independent reviewer hired by the British government will evaluate conditions at the Farm so that a decision about its future can be made. For obvious reasons, STC recommends that

footage of CTF operations obtained by WSPA before the scandal broke be included in this evaluation. We also expect that the reviewer will have access to all Farm facilities and believe a representative of WSPA or STC should be invited to participate in touring the facility with the reviewer. In addition to calls for accountability from the Farm, STC is publicly asking the Cayman Turtle Farm to permanently end sea turtle farming, and we encourage our members to take action by signing a petition at www.stopseaturtlefarm.org.

By Marydele Donnelly
Director of International Policy

Tour de Turtles

Calypso Blue, a leatherback from Panama, took top honors in this year's Tour de Turtle, winning first place in both the marathon and the Causes

Challenge. Sponsored by Atlantis, Paradise, Island, Calypso Blue traveled 3,268 miles in only 97 days. She is now off the Northeast Coast of the United States and will likely travel toward Europe to continue her migration. In the Causes Challenge, she raised \$6,539 in support of her cause: Commercial Trawl Fisheries. Karma, another leatherback from Panama sponsored by RFQ-hub, came in second place with 2,688 miles. And Lady Marmalade, a loggerhead turtle from Florida sponsored by The Body Shop Foundation, won third place in the marathon.

Visit tourdeturtles.org to see final placing for all the turtle competitors!

Tour de Turtles Bermuda

In the Bermuda edition of Tour de Turtles, five juvenile green turtles competed in a regional marathon. Tucker won first place after traveling 1,193 miles from Bermuda to South Florida.

Catherine came in second place with 912 miles in 94 days. She also left Bermuda toward the Bahamas. Coming in third place, Chubby traveled only 19 miles around Bermuda's nearshore water. In the Causes Challenge, Fripper came in first place raising more than \$800 to increase awareness about the impacts of coastal armoring to sea turtles. Sponsored by RenaissanceRe, Fripper was the first Tour de Turtles competitor released in Bermuda.

Visit tourdeturtles.org/Bermuda to see final placing for all the green turtle competitors!